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Amun Shea Partnership: Healthy Student Initiative

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Project Title: Amún Shéa Partnership: Healthy Student Initiative

Participants

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Abstract

GlobeMed partners with The Amún Shéa Center for Integrated Development, a non-profit organization in Perquín, El Salvador, which is accredited by the Salvadoran Ministry of Education. The mission of Amún Shéa is to empower Salvadoran youth by equipping them with the skills and tools they need to meet real world challenges. Youth empowerment is key to economic growth and community development. With this in mind, Amún Shéa has designed a curriculum that integrates both academics and development. Students work alongside faculty in planning and implementing solutions to local developmental obstacles and subsequently learn important administrative skills.

GlobeMed's partnership with Amún Shéa has been crucial in organization and execution of development projects. The focus of this project is the Healthy Student Initiative, which provides students with basic health and nutrition knowledge, along with opportunities for direct investigative application of the knowledge and skills gained.

Objectives

The purpose of the Healthy Student initiative is to integrate health, nutrition, and English in an action-based learning style in the classroom. The main projects involve middle and high school students in the curriculum planning process.

Middle school students participate in interactive classes that feature lessons on health and nutrition which integrate English language learning. They also participate in cooking sessions where they work in groups to prepare a chosen recipe. The selected recipes feature creative ways to incorporate vegetables and demonstrate that healthy foods can also taste great. For example, students have previously made chocolate brownies with beets or zucchini carrot muffins.

The high school students also participate in hands-on classes on health and nutrition, but apply the science through investigation. The current class investigation centers on the students' taste preferences of certain vegetables (broccoli, cauliflower, carrot, spinach, beets) at Amún Shéa as well as their liking of nutritious vegetable and fruit smoothies (their favorite currently being spinach with mangos and bananas). The high school students prepare these smoothies and carry out the investigation with a teacher's guidance. The recipes prepared and tested during this project will be passed on to the school's cooks for integration within the daily menu.

Overall, with the Healthy Student Initiative, we hope to encourage healthy habits from a young age that will continue into adulthood. We have seen the Initiative reach further into the community by having students bring recipes home to share with their families and we look forward to tracking the students' progress on these healthy eating habits over the next few years.

The poster found below is a research poster that the students have put together themselves.



Challenges

The biggest challenge by far was the unanticipated travel restriction, as the United States issued a travel warning to those going to El Salvador due to the high rates of violence. The GROW team had planned on working directly with the students at Amún Shéa. After finding out that working face-to-face with the students was no longer feasible, we had to immediately find other routes of communication and devise a new curriculum plan that included more remote work on our end.

Another challenge we faced was the poor internet connection in El Salvador. Once we changed the plans due to travel restrictions, we relied heavily on internet communications and didn't anticipate the unreliable connection. Thus, our work in the instructional videos was impaired because they would not load properly or had poor resolution for the students.

Our last challenge was a time constraint. Though this initiative has been successful in introducing nutrition and healthy eating into the classroom, we had also hoped to create curriculum around hygiene and preventable infections. We did not expect that our instructional videos for the students would take as long to make as they did. Thus, we did not fulfill that branch of the project and it will need be introduced next year when the GROW team plans the next wave of curriculum.

Real-Life Impact

Strengthen community partnerships

A focus on solidarity and extension within the community has been continuously emphasized throughout the initiative this year. Students have been educated on health and nutrition through action-based learning and have begun taking these lessons home to spread the knowledge. Many aspects of health and nutrition in the US are common knowledge and taught in school or even by parents who have the knowledge but for students in Amun Shea, this is not so. Thus, students sharing this knowledge with their families will allow the community to become aware of current nutritional deficiencies in daily meals and to find creative solutions.

Enhance global scholarship

Though the GROW team did not have the opportunity to travel to El Salvador this year, they have still worked closely with the students and teachers at Amún Shéa.

The students have also been integrating English into the Healthy Student Initiative lessons in order to better learn the language in every possible setting.

Advocate for inclusion and diversity

Aside from the GROW interns, there are forty-nine students, nine teachers, and six other staff members (cafeteria staff, janitors, and the agriculture team) involved in the implementation of new projects as well as the reinforcement of existing programs. By introducing new recipes to share and better nutritional value in meals, the Initiative has allowed students at Amún Shéa to work together and also include their families and the wider community into the learning process.

What We Learned

We have been able to work closely with members of the school's educational team to create a nutrition and healthy eating curriculum. We have been successful in creating videos that focus on the importance of nutrients, such as vitamins and minerals, and encourage healthy eating behavior among students at the Amún Shéa School. It was also exciting for us to learn more about nutrition and improve our Spanish speaking abilities. We are grateful to have been a part of this project despite the few obstacles we faced and we look forward to continuing and advancing our work with Amún Shéa this upcoming year.

Library Partnership

The Library Partnership was crucial in technical support when we created the curriculum videos for the students. The partnership also provided linguistic help with the Spanish-English language barrier. Lastly, the easy access we had to all of these resources that would have otherwise been unavailable to us made our work more efficient and our time more worthwhile.

Further Work

The next steps for this project will be to plan and implement a hygiene portion on top of the current health and nutrition courses. We will be working to improve the concepts of preventable infections and diseases through interactive, action-based learning activities that will demonstrate the effectiveness of proper hygiene in everyday life.

Acknowledgements

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Sponsorship Line

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